

3. *Economic opportunity and security indicators*

The framework value of Economic Opportunity and Security is defined in the Comprehensive Plan to include:

- equal opportunity for all Seattle citizens;
- maintaining a high quality of life, as measured by health care, food and shelter, education, and increased revenues to support needed public investment;
- a strong position in the global economy; and
- a learning environment that continually builds and enhances productive skills.

In the citywide residential surveys, citizens were asked to rate how jobs and economic opportunities have changed in Seattle. In 1996, 38% of respondents said that opportunities had improved. By 2001, only 36% of respondents believed that opportunities had improved, after increasing to 56% of residents seeing improvements in 1997 and 54% in 1999.

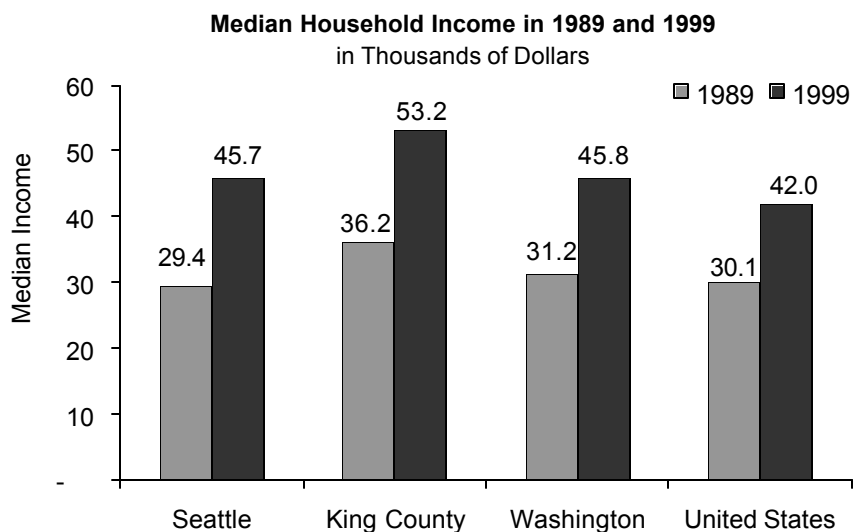
The indicators chosen to measure economic opportunity and security are:

- Household income
- Education level of the population
- High school dropout rate
- Teen birth rate
- Number of low-income housing units

Each of these indicators shows a different snapshot of the overall goals of economic opportunity and security. Taken together, they provide a sense of the city's progress toward a social equity and a productive and competitive economy.

Most of these indicators are showing positive trends. Household income is up in Seattle and increased quickly between 1989 and 1999. Seattle's population is one of the best educated in the country, while the high school drop-out rate has remained fluctuated between 1994 and 2002, but remains fairly constant. The teen birth rate has dropped sharply between 1994 and 2000. Finally, in spite of drops in federal funding for subsidized housing units, the City and State have increased funding for subsidized units and the number of subsidized units has increased between 1994 and 2002.

Household income: Seattle's Median Household Income increased more than King County, Washington State, or the nation.



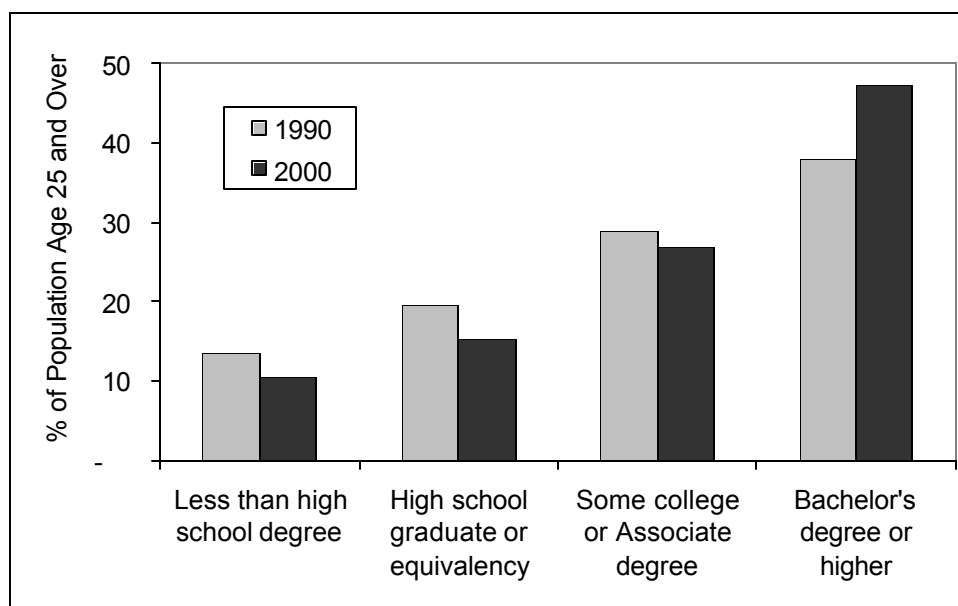
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000 censuses.

This indicator measures the change in income for households in Seattle between 1990 and 2000. Each figure shows a trend toward increased income.

An increase in household income means an increase in real purchasing power, when wages increase above the level of inflation. An increase in real purchasing power relates to several goals in the Comprehensive Plan's Economic Development Element. Goal EDG4 calls for the city to develop a highly trained work force that can earn a living wage.

Higher household income also relates to the affordability of housing in Seattle. As wages increase, fewer households may need assistance with housing costs. (Housing Element Goals HG12 to HG17). On the other hand, increased housing costs may lead to an increase in the median income of home owners and renters, as lower-income households become unable to afford housing in Seattle.

Education level of the population: Seattle has a higher share of



adults with a college degree in 2000 than in 1990

The number of Seattle residents with Bachelors degrees increased by more than 30,000 between 1990 and 2000. More than 20,000 additional residents have graduate or professional degrees in 2000 than a decade earlier. There were 17,000 fewer residents who had attained a high school diploma or less. Surprisingly, Seattle has a higher share of residents with less than a high school diploma than the rest of King County, even though it also has a higher share of residents with Bachelor's, graduate and professional degrees than the rest of the County.

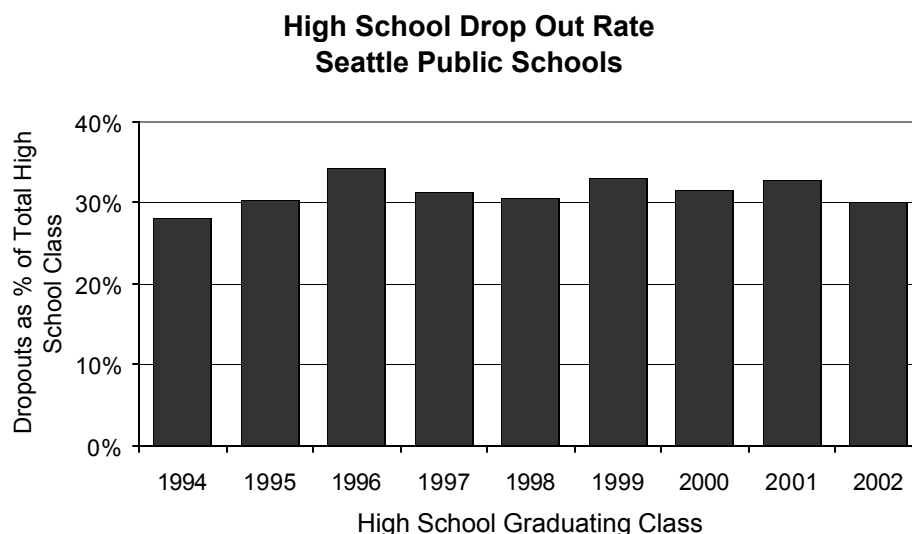
The City's Colleges and Universities have helped to create such a high level of education in Seattle's population. In 2000, over 11 percent of residents of Seattle were enrolled in college or graduate school.

The Human Development Element describes this aspect of the Comprehensive Plan vision in HDG4: "Promote an excellent educational system and opportunities for life-long learning for all Seattle residents" and in HDG5: "Promote development of literacy and employability among Seattle residents."

Higher levels of education may provide a higher quality of life, and higher education can mean more marketable skills--and higher wages--in an increasingly competitive and technologically oriented economy. Higher education pays off for the community too. If Seattle workers meet employers' increasingly sophisticated needs, they can contribute to the economic growth of the city and the region. The Comprehensive Plan's Economic Development element recognizes that a strong economy demands a strong educational infrastructure. Goal G4 in that Element states that a city goal is to "Develop a highly trained local work force that can better compete for meaningful and productive employment, earn a living wage and meet the needs of business."

Although the City is not an education provider, City programs help support the Seattle school district to provide an environment in which children thrive and are motivated to stay in school. The Families and Education levy funds a network of multi-cultural, community-based programs for teens to encourage success in school and to prevent involvement in gangs, drugs, and crime. In 1998, the City started Project Lift-Off, to build a network of affordable early learning and youth engagement programs to improve the way our community prepares children for the future. For example, as part of Project Lift-Off the City helps to support community education centers, which have led to better school attendance, higher homework completion rates, and a more positive approach to school, among participants.

High school dropout rate: the high school drop out rate for students in the Class of 2002 was higher than the 1994 rate.



The dropout rate tracks students entering high school and determines how many of those students complete high school within two years of their expected graduation date. In 1994, 28.1% of students dropped out of high school before graduating. In 2002, 30.1% of students had dropped out. Between 1994 and 2002, the dropout rate has fluctuated at or above 30%, with a high of 34.3% in 1996.

Dropout rates have differed widely by racial/ethnic group. In 2002, African American students were more likely to graduate than they were in 1994. However, American Indian, Latino and White students were less likely to complete high school in 2001 than they were in 1994. The dropout rate for Asian students has stayed the same.

% of Students Completing (or still in) High School by Race/Ethnicity

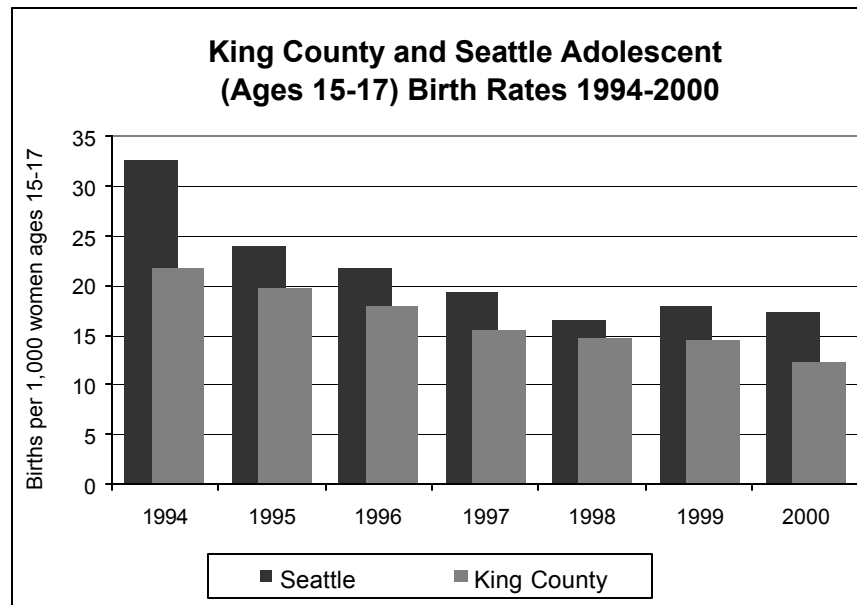
	Class of 1994	Class of 2002	Change 1994-2001
African American	59%	61%	+2%
American Indian	58%	52%	-6%
Asian	80%	80%	0%
Latino	64%	59%	-5%
White (non-Latino)	76%	73%	-3%
Total	72%	70%	-2%

Dropping out of high school can impair a person's ability to earn a living wage in an increasingly competitive economy. High school can provide basic skills on which students can build further career and vocational skills. Not having a high school diploma can be a barrier to getting many jobs. According to the 2000 Census, Seattle residents without high school diplomas are 2.5 times more likely to be in poverty than are residents with diplomas.

The Comprehensive Plan's Economic Development Element, Policy ED1, commits the City to:

“...work with the Seattle Public Schools to improve the quality of public education and increase the likelihood that all young people will complete high school having achieved the basic competency needed to continue their education and/or enter the work force.”

Teen births: The rate of births to teenage mothers in Seattle has dropped 45% since 1994.



Seattle's teen birth rate has decreased since 1994, although there has been a slight increase since 1998. Seattle's teen birth rate is slightly higher than the rate in other parts of King County. In 2000, the Seattle/King County Health Department measured teen births in Seattle at about 17 births per 1,000 teenage women in Seattle. The rate for King County outside of Seattle was 11 births per 1000 teenage women. However, the differences between Seattle and the rest of the County are closing. Between 1995 and 1999, the differences between the city and the King County birth rates were statistically insignificant given the size of the populations measured.

Through the Comprehensive Plan Human Development goals, the City has committed to:

- promoting healthier lifestyles,
- reducing health risks such as those associated with teen pregnancy, and
- providing children and youth with the opportunity to develop their personal and career opportunities fully.

Teen pregnancy can have negative effects on the future of both the mother and her child. For the child, teen pregnancy tends to be associated with poorer pre-natal care, lower birth weights, and more physical and psychological development problems. For the mother, pregnancy can interrupt education and the development of career skills. Consequently, teen pregnancy is often associated with unemployment, lack of education, and poverty.

Human Services Element goal HDG8.5 seeks "the health and well-being of all women, children and families in Seattle by moving toward the elimination of unintended pregnancy."

The City of Seattle's Families and Education Levy provides funds for teen health clinics in High Schools, which can provide reproductive health services to Seattle's teens.

Low-income housing units: in 2002, 28,142 units of subsidized rental housing were available to low-income households in Seattle.

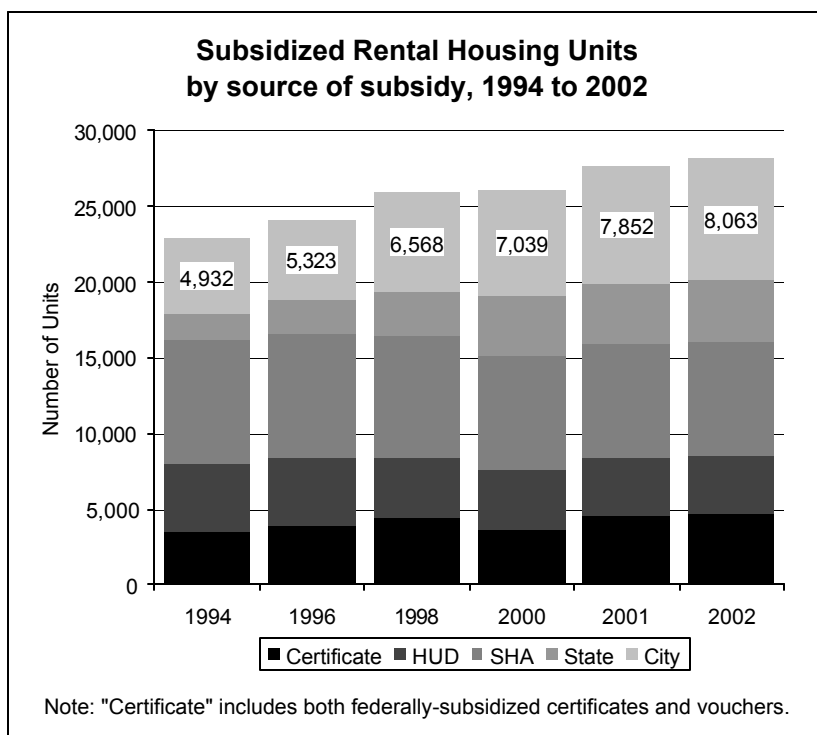
Approximately 30% (8,063) of these units received assistance from the City of Seattle. The City helped to produce 813 new housing units for low-income households in 2001.

Between 1978 and 2002, the total number of assisted rental housing units in Seattle has more than doubled, from approximately 12,000 to over 28,000. The biggest gains in units affordable to low-income households in the last eight years have resulted from City and State actions. The City has been increasingly active in housing assistance. From 1994 to 2002, over 3,000 units have received City subsidies. Seattle voters have passed four levy measures since 1981 to help provide low-income housing.

The number of low-income units receiving subsidies from the federal government (Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Seattle Housing Authority) has been falling for many years. Part of this decrease is a result of HUD's shift away from subsidizing specific units towards granting vouchers which can be used by households to subsidize housing that they choose. The use of certificates and vouchers by households to subsidize units in Seattle has grown from 3,525 certificates in 1994 to 4,675 certificates in 2002.

Although the production of low-income housing assistance has expanded, the number of household units needing assistance has also grown. Between 1990 and 2000 over 6,500 additional low-income units became available in Seattle. However, in 2000, over 26,000 of Seattle's households were earning less than 50% of the city's median income and paying more than 35% of their income for housing costs. In addition, the Seattle/King County coalition for the homeless counted almost 1,500 homeless people on Seattle's streets in 2001. Over 3,000 households used Seattle's services for the homeless in 2001.

The Comprehensive Plan's Housing Element sets out the city's policies to provide housing that is affordable. Section C of the Housing Element articulates the city's Goals and Policies specifically relating to housing affordable to low-income, moderate-income and publicly subsidized low-income households.



The Comprehensive Plan is required to be consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies. Countywide Planning Policy AH-6 requires the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) to review the performance of cities within the county, including Seattle, with respect to meeting low- and moderate-income housing needs. The County has determined that, in order to meet demand for low-income housing, at least 21% of the housing stock should be affordable to those earning under 50% of median income, and 17% should be affordable to those earning 50% to 80% of median income. Taken together, 38% of the housing stock should be affordable to these low income groups. Seattle is one of only nine cities in King County providing sufficient housing for both income groups, and one of two cities outside of South King County to provide housing affordable to those groups.

The City has numerous programs that assist low-income renters and home owners, including:

- loaning money to non-profit organizations to develop housing,
- rental subsidies to households,
- support for low-income households that are forced to move out of their apartment,
- weatherization programs and other energy-saving measures that lower housing costs for low-income homes,
- housing rehabilitation loans to home owners,
- minor home repair assistance, and
- first-time down-payment assistance.